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Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00

INRE-00 TRSE-00 EB-07 /060 W
---------- 079271
O 222231Z NOV 76
FM AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1719
INFO AMCONSUL MONTREAL IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL QUEBEC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L OTTAWA 4632

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, CA
SUBJECT: WESTERN REACTION TO QUEBEC ELECTION: POSSIBLE
PREMIERS' ALLIANCE WITH PQ

REF: (A) OTTAWA 4552; (B) OTTAWA 3994

1. SUMMARY: PUBLIC AND MEDIA REACTION IN WESTERN CANADA TO PQ VICTORY HAS BEEN CALM WITH CERTAIN RELIEF THAT QUEBEC SITUATION IS NOW OUT IN THE OPEN. WESTERNERS WILL LIKELY MAINTAIN THIS POSTURE AS OTTAWA AND PQ BARGAINING UNFOLDS. WESTERN PREMIERS HAVE EXPRESSED LESS CONFRONTATIONAL REACTION TOWARDS PQ THAN HAS TRUDEAU. THEY WILL, HOWEVER, NOT LIKELY REMAIN PASSIVE AS FED/PQ SKIRMISHING DEVELOPS. THEY PROBABLY WILL PRESS OTTAWA FOR REDRESS OF PERCEIVED GRIEVANCES AND DEVOLUTION OF GREATER POWER TO THE PROVINCES. THEY MAY EVEN FORM MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE WITH PQ IN PRESSING FEDGOV ON THESE; ASSUMING PQ DOES NOT PRESS UNACCEPTABLE, SEPARATIST DEMANDS. END SUMMARY.

2. WEST OF ONTARIO, PUBLIC AND MEDIA REACTION TO PQ QUEBEC VICTORY HAS BEEN GENERALLY CALM WITH A WAIT-AND-SEE ATTITUDE MIXED WITH SOME RELIEF THAT THE QUEBEC SITUATION IS NOW IN THE OPEN FOR SETTLEMENT ONE WAY OR THE OTHER.
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3. WE BELIEVE THAT WESTERNERS WILL MAINTAIN A POSTURE OF CONCERNED BUT COMPOSED BYSTANDERS, AS OTTAWA AND PQ BECOME INCREASINGLY LOCKED IN BARGAINING. LARGE MAJORITY OF WESTERN PUBLIC IS BASICALLY MODERATE AND FEDERALIST DESPITE HIGHLY VOCAL MINORITY WHICH HOLDS "GOOD RIDDANCE TO QUEBEC" VIEWS AND/OR WHICH BELONGS TO THE EQUALLY VOCAL BUT SMALL PRAIRIE PROVINCE OR B.C. SEPARATIST CAMPS.

4. WESTERN PREMIERS HAVE GENERALLY ADOPTED A LESS CONFRONTATIONAL REACTION TOWARDS THE PQ THAN HAS TRUDEAU. THEY ARE NOT LIKELY, HOWEVER, TO MAINTAIN A PASSIVE ROLE AS FEDERAL/PQ SKIRMISHING UNFOLDS. FOR PAST SEVERAL YEARS, WESTERN PREMIERS (WITH QUEBEC'S BOURASSA) HAVE BEEN IN FOREFRONT OF PROVINCIAL EFFORTS TO EXTRACT FROM OTTAWA GREATER PROVINCIAL POWERS. AT OCTOBER TORONTO PREMIERS' CONFERENCE, FOR EXAMPLE, PREMIERS COULD NOT AGREE ON FORMULA TO PATRIATE CONSTITUTION, BUT THEY DID AGREE ON GRAB BAG OF PROPOSED AMENDMENTS, ALL DESIGNED TO INCREASE PROVINCIAL POWERS (REF B). NOTABLE AMONG THESE WERE WESTERN-BACKED PROPOSALS TO INCREASE PROVINCIAL TAX AUTHORITY OVER NATURAL RESOURCES AND TO STRIP FROM FEDERAL GOVERNMENT THE RIGHT TO DECLARE, WITHOUT PROVINCIAL ASSENT, A PARTICULAR RESOURCE OR PRODUCT UNDER FEDERAL JURISDICTION.

5. APART FROM CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM, WESTERN PREMIERS HAVE ALSO BEEN IN FOREFRONT (AGAIN WITH QUEBEC) IN SEEKING REDRESS FROM OTTAWA FOR VARIETY OF PERCEIVED GRIEVANCES. FOR EXAMPLE, ALL WESTERN PROVINCES HAVE FOR YEARS DEMANDED A REVISED FREIGHT RATE STRUCTURE. ALBERTA HAS COMPLAINED ABOUT POLICIES WHICH IT THINKS INHIBIT ESTABLISHMENT OF A PETROCHEMICAL INDUSTRY IN ALBERTA. SASKATCHEWAN HAS PRESSED (WITH QUEBEC) FOR GREATER CONTROL IN THE COMMUNICATIONS FIELD.

6. WE ANTICIPATE THAT THE DRAMATIC EMERGENCE OF A SEPARATIST THREAT IN QUEBEC WILL NOT ALTER WESTERN DEMANDS FOR CONCESSIONS FROM THE FEDERAL GOVT AND, IN SOME CASES, A DEVOLUTION OF CONSTITUTIONAL POWER. INDEED, WESTERN PREMIERS MAY WELL USE THE PQ THREAT AS LEVERAGE FOR ACHIEVING THESE GOALS. ALTERNATIVELY THEY MAY ATTEMPT TO MEDIATE OTTAWA-QUEBEC DIFFERENCES.

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7. TWO FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL CONFERENCES ARE SCHEDULED WITHIN THE NEXT MONTH: FIRST IS TO CONSIDER REVISIONS IN FEDERAL/ PROVINCIAL FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS, INCLUDING SHARED-COST, EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND SOCIAL PROGRAMS; SECOND IS A FOLLOW-UP TO TORONTO CONFERENCE, SEEKING FORMUAL TO PATRIATE THE CONSTITUTION.

8. AT BOTH CONFERENCES, WE EXPECT THAT WESTERN PREMIERS WILL

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PRESS THEIR CASES AT LEAST AS HARD AS PREVIOUSLY. AND, UNLESS PQ TABLES UNACCEPTABLE SEPARATIST PROPOSALS, WESTERN PROVINCES COULD JOIN WITH QUEBEC IN COORDINATED EFFORT AGAINST FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.

9. SOME OBSERVERS HERE SUGGEST THAT SUCH AN ALLIANCE COULD BENEFIT FEDERALIST CAUSE. THEY ARGUE THAT GREATEST DANGER TO CONFEDERATION WOULD BE ISOLATION OF QUEBEC AND THAT A PROVINCIAL COMMON FRONT VIS-A-VIS THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WOULD AVOID CREATING THIS SITUATION AND TEND TO FOSTER A DEGREE OF KINSHIP BETWEEN PQ-CONTROLLED QUEBEC AND SISTER PROVINCES. THEORY IS THAT PQ MIGHT BE TAMED THROUGH THIS ASSOCIATION.

10. WHATEVER ITS POSSIBLY CIVILIZING EFFECTS ON PQ, THIS COMMON FRONT COULD PLACE TRUDEAU AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IN A DIFFICULT POSITION. TRUDEAU HAS ALREADY INDICATED THAT HE WILL NOT NEGOTIATE SEPARATION WITH THE PQ (REF A). BUT IF THE PQ TACTICALLY ADOPTED A POSTURE OF CHIPPING AWAY AT FEDERALIST TIES WITH A SERIES OF SEEMINGLY MODERATE DEMANDS, AND IF PQ JOINED WITH OTHER PROVINCES IN A COMMON CAUSE, IT COULD BE THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, NOT THE PQ, WHICH WOULD BE ISOLATED.
ENDERS

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